

# INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT

## ***AUTHORITY***

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, Section 102(b).

*For the purpose of this manual, use of the terms **must** or **shall** reflect requirements of Federal law or regulation or state law or administrative regulations and must be adhered to strictly.*

## ***GENERAL INFORMATION***

The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) must be developed in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The IPE (including amendments) is that portion of the case record used to plan for services leading to an employment outcome. It reflects the informed choice of the eligible individual in selecting the employment outcome, specific services, service providers, and method of procuring services.

After determining eligibility, the IPE is to be developed and implemented in a timely manner. As a general guideline, the IPE *should* be developed within ninety (90) days of eligibility determination. However, the unique needs of the individual **must** be taken into consideration. For example, an individual served in a Community-Based Work Transition Program (CBWTP) may need a longer period of time to explore career options prior to plan development. Such exceptions to the expected practice should be documented in the case record.

The consumer may choose to develop and write all or part of the IPE with the assistance of a counselor; alone or with the help of a representative; or may request that the counselor write the IPE. It must be executed on the Agency approved form. The following elements must be included in the IPE, as appropriate:

- Specific Employment Outcome in the most integrated setting based on informed choice
- Outcome Date
- Specific Services to be provided in order to achieve the employment outcome
- Provider of each service
- Initial Beginning Date for each vocational rehabilitation service (not to precede the date of the IPE)
- Supported Employment to include extended services and provider
- Comparable Benefits
- Evaluation Criteria
- Consumer Responsibilities
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation responsibilities
- Post-Employment Services

The IPE (including amendments) must be mutually agreed upon and signed jointly by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and the individual and/or, as appropriate, a parent, guardian, or other representative. The IPE must be reviewed with the consumer at least annually.

A copy of the IPE, amendments and employment outcome, must be provided to the individual and/or, as appropriate, the parent, guardian, or other representative. The plan must additionally be provided in the individual's native language or mode of communication if necessary for the full participation of the individual with a disability.

## ***GUIDANCE***

Some counselors have the misconception that consumer choice limits the role and responsibilities of the rehabilitation counselor in plan development. The most valuable service the Agency provides is guidance and counseling. Counselors have knowledge and expertise in disabilities as they relate to employment, assessment techniques, career counseling, accommodations, employment law, assistive technology, labor market information, job search activities, rehabilitation services, and local service providers. It is the role of the counselor to help the individual explore interests, strengths, abilities, and resources and develop the best possible plan. Consumer choice is severely limited when the individual does not have access to the wealth of knowledge of a rehabilitation professional. Quality guidance and counseling provides the foundation for the individual to make appropriate informed choices regarding the vocational goal, services, and service providers necessary for achievement of a successful employment outcome.

The IPE is a natural extension of the eligibility process and the assessment to determine rehabilitation needs. Services, including expanded services, documented on the IPE should relate to the limitations and attendant factors identified on the Eligibility Worksheet or through the assessment to determine rehabilitation needs. Conversely, all significantly limited areas of functional capacity noted on the Eligibility Worksheet should be addressed through services on the plan. Services that contribute to the rehabilitation of the individual should be included on the plan whether or not the Office is providing or paying for the service.

All services should relate to the achievement of the vocational objective.

The Individualized Plan for Employment form was developed to insure that all mandatory components of the IPE are addressed. Some counselors find it helpful to add to the form to clarify content. The IPE form may be added to but no portion can be deleted.

The IPE form does not contain a section for the projected need for post-employment services. That need must be assessed at the time of plan development and included in the IPE if determined to be necessary. The counselor may document this need on the IPE in any fashion deemed most appropriate.

## ***INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS***

The consumer has several options in developing an Individualized Plan for Employment. The individual with a disability may choose to develop and write all or part of the IPE with the assistance of a counselor; alone or with the help of a representative; or may request that the counselor write the IPE. An Individualized Plan for Employment Options and Instructions Packet is to be provided to each consumer interested in producing a plan without the assistance of the counselor. The packet contains a brief summary of the required elements of an IPE; instructions for completing the IPE forms including amendments; information on expanded definitions; and copies of the necessary forms. The IPE must be on Agency approved forms. The Client Assistance Program is available to provide technical assistance to the eligible individual on developing an IPE.

Regardless of the option chosen, the IPE must be mutually agreed upon and signed by the consumer and/or, if appropriate, a parent, guardian or representative and the counselor.

As in all areas of the rehabilitation process, the establishment of a strong counseling relationship is imperative to the development of a successful plan. When differences of opinion occur, the counselor should utilize counseling and negotiation skills to resolve the dispute. If the consumer and counselor cannot come to an agreement, the counselor does **not** sign the plan and informs the consumer of all appropriate appeal rights.

## ***GUIDANCE***

Regardless of the option chosen, the role of the counselor remains the same: to assist the eligible individual with a disability in making appropriate choices of goals, services, providers, etc. in order to achieve a successful employment outcome. The rehabilitation counselor has unique knowledge and skills for this task. It is the counselor's responsibility to provide adequate information and guidance regarding the local labor market, quality and availability of services, rehabilitation technology, accommodations, employment laws, comparable benefits, procedures and limitations for payment, etc. so that the individual can make appropriate decisions.

Although the IPE is required to be in writing, it is imperative that the consumer understands and fully participates in the development of the plan. All elements of the IPE are to be explored with the eligible individual in the language and communication mode that allows fullest participation.

## ***AMENDMENTS***

Amendments are written anytime there is a **significant** change in the IPE. Common reasons for amendments include changing the employment goal or adding/canceling a service. An amendment must be signed by the counselor, consumer, and/or, when needed, a parent, guardian, or representative prior to the delivery of services.

Since amendments must be agreed to and signed prior to a change in service, goal, or provider, the closure statement cannot serve as an amendment. It may be appropriate, however, to write an amendment concurrently with the closure to amend services that were planned but not provided.

## ***ANNUAL REVIEWS***

At least once a year from the date of the IPE or the last annual review, the counselor and consumer must review the progress of the rehabilitation plan and make adjustments as needed. A record of these reviews must appear in the case record. The counselor may use progress notes or any other format deemed most appropriate for this purpose. When recording in the progress notes, it is best practice to clearly identify the note as an **Annual Review**. If the review results in a significant change to the rehabilitation program, an amendment must be written. Case progress should continue to be documented regularly in the progress notes.

## ***TRANSITION STUDENTS***

In developing an IPE for a student who has an active Individual Education Plan (IEP), the counselor must consider the relevant elements in this plan while developing the IPE. Goals, accommodations, and services reflected in the IEP and relevant to the achievement of a vocational objective should be incorporated into the Individualized Plan for Employment. The purpose of this coordination is to provide continuity of services as the student with a disability leaves the school system and continues working with OVR. Every effort should be made to insure that obstacles or delays are addressed or resolved prior to the student leaving the school system.

## ***TRIAL WORK EXPERIENCE***

The Office has chosen to utilize the IPE form in documenting trial work experiences. The counselor and the consumer and/or, as appropriate, the consumer's parent, guardian or representative are to jointly develop a plan for a meaningful work experience to assess the individual's ability to benefit from OVR services. The IPE with trial work experience as the goal should be completed to the maximum extent possible identifying services, service providers, time frames, etc. There is no specific time period for reviewing the progress of an individual in a trial work experience. Counselor judgement should be used to develop appropriate time frames and measurements to assist the consumer in moving toward employment.

## ***DOCUMENTATION***

The purpose of documentation is to show the progress of a case and should make case reviews easier. Documentation should be done so that a third party, totally unfamiliar with the case, can promptly and easily see what is happening with the case and can understand why counselor made a particular decision.

Generally we consider the progress notes as this documentation. However, the entire case record serves as documentation and information contained elsewhere does not have to be duplicated in the progress notes.

Notes should include a summary of counseling sessions, indicate services rendered that are not clearly marked in other case documents, denote problem areas, collaboration with other professionals, agencies, etc. Notes can be an overview capturing the content of a session or event. For initial interviews, some counselors have found a structured form with key questions, checklist of forms, etc. to be helpful.

An entry in the case notes will give the counselor credit for the many services rendered. Much hard work and effort is often not reflected in the case. Notes should be kept as objective and factual as possible. Each case is a legal document that potentially could be examined in a court of law. Thus, judgmental statements, labels, innuendoes, etc. should never be included in the progress notes. The best practice is that progress notes should be written so that if the consumer reads the note, he/she would not be upset, offended, etc.

Rehabilitation assistants may also write case notes reflecting the conversations and other pertinent work done with or on behalf of the consumer.